

Message Text

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, GY, US, CU, XA

SUBJECT: GUYANA-CUBA: DISCUSSION WITH FOREIGN MINISTER WILLS

REF: A) GEORGETOWN 0727, STATE 87613

1. NOT HAVING HEARD FROM WILLS SINCE OUR MEETING ON APRIL 12 (REFTEL A), I PHONED HIM THIS MORNING (APRIL 15) AND HE AGREED TO SEE ME AT 10:30. WE TALKED FOR OVER TWO HOURS WITH HALF HOUR LEAD-IN OF HIS OBSERVATIONS AND IMPRESSIONS OF FINAL DAYS OF WATERGATE WHICH HE IS READING.

2. WHEN WE GOT AROUND TO GDF TROOPS BEING TRAINED IN CUBA, WILLS SAID THIS WAS A FACT, CONFIRMED BY BURNHAM. IN COURSE OF DISCUSSION WILLS SAID GDF TROOPS HAVE BEEN AND ARE BEING TRAINED IN CUBA WITH 128 PRESENTLY IN CUBA UNDERGOING JUNGLE WARFARE AND SPECIAL WEAPONS TRAINING. HE SAID BURNHAM HAD AUTHORIZED HIM TO STATE TO ME AS USG REPRESENTATIVE THAT THIS TRAINING IS FOR STRICTLY DEFENSIVE PURPOSES AND TO ASSURE USG THAT GOG HAS NO AGGRESSIVE INTENT WHATSOEVER. ON QUESTION OF POSSIBLE DEPLOYMENT TO AFRICA, WILLS SAID HE COULD GIVE ME CATEGORIC ASSURANCE THERE WAS NO SUCH INTENTION ON THE PART OF GOG.

3. WILLS SAID I HAD BEEN CORRECT IN MY ASSUMPTION REGARDING RATIONALE FOR SENDING GDF TO CUBA RATHER THAN BRINGING CUBAN ADVISERS TO GUYANA PARA 8 (REFTEL A). TO THIS I REMARKED IT SEEMED TO ME THAT HAVING MADE SUCH A POINT OF BRINGING FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS TO GUYANA TO OBSERVE FOR THEMSELVES THAT THERE

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WERE NO CUBAN ADVISERS, THESE REPORTERS WOULD FEEL THEY HAD BEEN

TAKEN IN WHEN THEY LEARNED, AS THEY INEVITABLY WOULD, THAT AT THE VERY TIME THEY WERE BEING SHOWN AROUND GUYANA, GDF TROOPS WERE ALREADY IN CUBA BEING TRAINED. THEY WOULD SEE THIS AS THE SAME QUOTE BANANA UNQUOTE AND WOULD BE BADLY BURNED UP AT BOTH BURNHAM AND GUYANA. WILLS RUEFULLY AGREED, BUT AGAIN INSISTED GOG LEADERS PERCEIVED A REAL THREAT PRINCIPALLY FROM BRQZIL BUT ALSO FROM VENEZUELA, AND HE HOPED THE USG WOULD VIEW THEIR CONSEQUENT PERCEIVED NEED FOR ADVANCED TRAINING OF GDF TROOPS IN THIS LIGHT.

4. AS POSSIBLE EXPLANATION FOR STORY ABOUT EVENTUAL DEPLOYMENT TO AFRICA, WILLS SAID HE THOUGHT THIS HAD COME ABOUT BECAUSE THE TROOPS WERE NOT GIVEN FULL INFORMATION AND WERE ENJOINED FROM CORRESPONDING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS, THUS GIVEN CLOAK AND DAGGER IMPRESSION FROM WHICH IT WAS EASY TO EXTRAPOLATE THE AFRICAN DESTINATION.

5. WILLS WENT ON TO SPEAK AT SOME LENGTH ABOUT THE INCREASINGLY ISOLATED AND DIFFICULT POSITION IN WHICH HE FINDS HIMSELF WITHIN CABINET FRAMEWORK. HE SAID BURNHAM WAS ANNOYED THAT WE HAD LEARNED ABOUT GDF TRAINING, BUT SEEMED EQUALLY ANNOYED THAT MATTER HAD BEEN RAISED THROUGH FONMIN. ACCORDING TO WILLS, BURNHAM CONTENTED THAT THIS WAS STRICTLY A MILITARY MATTER AND IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN RAISED WITH HIM AS MINISTER OF DEFENSE, AND HAD BRUSHED ASIDE WILLS' CONTENTION THAT THERE WERE CLEAR AND IMPORTANT FOREIGN POLICY IMPLICATIONS IN THE MATTER. IN SHORT, WILLS SAID BURNHAM HAD INSTRUCTED HIM TO TELL ME THAT FUTURE INQUIRIES OF THIS NATURE SHOULD BE RAISED DIRECTLY WITH BURNHAM AS MINISTER OF DEFENSE.

6. RESPONDING TO WILLS' PLEA THAT WE SEE THIS IN THE LIGHT OF GUYANA'S DEFENSE NEEDS, I ASKED HIM TO LISTEN AGAIN TO THE SECOND TALKING POINT IN PARA 2 REFTEL B. I ADDED THAT GUYANA'S NEIGHBORS WERE BOUND EVENTUALLY TO LEARN OF THE GDF CONTINGENTS BEING TRAINED IN CUBA, AND THIS WOULD ONLY SERVE TO ESCALATE THE CONCERNS THEY ARE ALREADY SHOWING BY INCREASED TROOP DISPOSITIONS AND SKIRMISHES IN BORDER AREAS. I SAID IT SEEMED TO ME THIS WAS PLAYING STRAIGHT INTO CASTRO'S HANDS IN THAT WITH EACH SUCCESSIVE STAGE OF CLOSER COLLABORATION BETWEEN GUYANA AND CUBA THERE WAS A CORRESPONDING ALIENATION OF GUYANA'S NEIGHBORS AND FRIENDS IN THE HEMISPHERE. I SAW A DANGER THAT THIS COULD END WITH GUYANA TOTALLY DEPENDENT UPON CUBA IN MUCH THE SAME FASHION

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THAT CUBA IS CONFINED TO WHAT HE HAD EARLIER DESCRIBED AS QUOTE A SOVIET STRATEGIC STRAIGHT JACKET UNQUOTE.

7. WILLS SAID HE COULD ASSURE ME THAT BURNHAM AND HE WERE NOT FOOLS; THEY FULLY REALIZE THAT IF GUYANA CALLED FOR CUBAN TROOPS TO DEFEND GUYANA THEY WOULD END UP BEING CAPTIVES OF CUBA, AND PROBABLY BE REPLACED BY SOMEONE LIKE JAGGAN. HE ADDED IN A PLAINTIVE TONE THAT THE PROBLEM WAS TO CONVINCE THE US THAT GUYANA'S

PREFERENCE FOR SOCIALISM WAS STRICTLY A DOMESTIC AFFAIR AND MEANT NO HOSTILITY TOWARD THE U.S. IN FACT, HE REMINDED ME HE HAD TOLD A VISITING DELEGATION FROM THE CANADIAN DEFENCE COLLEGE LAST WEEK, RESPONDING TO A QUESTION BY STATE DEPT STUDENT FROEBE, THAT IN THE EVENT VENEZUELA INVADED GUYANA IN PURSUIT OF ITS TERRITORIAL CLAIM, GUYANA WOULD TURN FIRST FOR ASSISTANCE TO THE US, AND THEREAFTER TO BRAZIL. I TOLD WILLS I COULD ASSURE HIM, AS I KNEW SECRETARY KISSINGER HAD DONE, THAT IT WAS NO REPEAT NO CONCERN TO US, WHETHER GUYANA WISHED TO HAVE A SOCIALIST OR MARXIST REGIME INTERNALLY. THE TWO MAJOR PROBLEMS FOR THE US WERE, FIRST, GUYANA'S INCREASING ALIGNMENT WITH CUBA AND, SECOND, AS HE WAS WELL AWARE, GUYANA'S UNCONDITIONAL ALIGNMENT WITH THE NON-ALIGNED ON ISSUES IN THE UN AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL FORUMS WHERE OUR VITAL INTERESTS WERE AT STAKE. I SAID I WAS CONVINCED IF THESE TWO NEGATIVE FACTORS WERE NOT PRESENT, THE US WOULD NOT ONLY BE ABLE TO GET ALONG WITH GUYANA, BUT WOULD BE IN A POSITION TO EXTEND A HELPING HAND AS WE HAD FROM THE BEGINNING OF GUYANA'S INDEPENDENCE. WILLS SAID THAT PERSONALLY THIS WAS WHAT HE HOPED TO ACHIEVE, BUT HE WAS FACING TOUGH OBSTACLES AND NEEDED TIME TO GET HIS VIEWS ACCEPTED BY BURNHAM AND CABINET.

8. COMMENT: WILLS CAME THROUGH WITH CONSIDERABLE SINCERITY, PARTICULARLY IN HIS ASSERTION THAT HE HAD BEEN BYPASSED IN THE DECISION TO SEND TROOPS TO CUBA. HE SAID HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN TIPPED OFF BY A REPORT FROM THE NUMBER TWO MAN IN GUYANESE EMBASSY HAVANA THAT THERE HAD BEEN A MIX-UP ABOUT A COUPLE OF GUYANESE MILITARY PERSONNEL WHOSE COVER APPARENTLY HAD BEEN BLOWN ON ARRIVAL. HE SAID HE HAD ASSUMED THIS WAS AN ISOLATED INSTANCE OF SOME KIND OF CLOAK AND DAGGER CAPER BY BURNHAM. HE SAID HE WAS REALLY SHOCKED TO FIND THAT HIS PERMANENT SECY HAD PICKED UP THE TROOP TRAINING STORY FROM RUMORS GOING AROUND GEORGETOWN. WILLS FURTHER SAID HE HAD TOLD BURNHAM HE WOULD UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES REMAIN IN CABINET IF BURNHAM HAD ANY INTENTION OF DEPLOYING TROOPS TO

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AFRICA, AND HE SAID BURNHAM HAD GIVEN HIM FORMAL ASSURANCE ON THIS POINT.

9. I BELIEVE WE HAVE MADE OUR POINT AND THAT BURNHAM MUST NOW REALIZE HE CANNOT EXPECT TO CONTINUE HIS UNDERCOVER MILITARY RELATIONSHIP WITH CUBA WITHOUT AT THE SAME TIME EXACERBATING HIS RELATIONS WITH USG AND INCURRING THE RISK OF OPEN HOSTILITIES FROM HIS TWO NEIGHBORS. IN THIS CONNECTION WILLS CONFIRMED STORY WE HAVE BEEN GETTING FROM VARIOUS SOURCES TO THE EFFECT THERE WAS A RECENT ARMED CLASH BETWEEN GDF AND VENEZUELAN TROOPS ALONG BARIMA RIVER, AND THAT THERE HAVE BEEN A SERIES OF MINOR EPISODES BETWEEN AUGMENTED BRAZILIAN GARRISONS AND GDF TROOPS ALONG IRENG RIVER.

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